

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA)**

**PROPOSED SHARED GROUP BICYCLE CAMPSITES AT WHITEFISH LAKE, FLATHEAD
LAKE - WAYFARERS, PLACID LAKE, AND SALMON LAKE STATE PARKS**

December 2015

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Montana State Parks (MSP) maintains 55 state parks that provide a variety of recreational opportunities. According to *Charting a New Tomorrow: Montana State Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan, 2015-2020*, visitation to Montana State Parks is increasing and visitors are seeking a variety of amenities. This includes an increasing demand for campsites at Montana State Parks that can accommodate bicyclists on long distance bicycle tours.

There are several national bicycle tour routes that travel through Montana, including the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route that starts in Canada and ends in New Mexico, and the Northern Tier Cross Continent Route that starts in Washington and ends in Maine. Bicyclists along these routes often camp at nearby state parks, such as Whitefish Lake and Flathead Lake - Wayfarers State Parks. Bicyclists generally ride during the day and arrive late to campgrounds when all the campsites may have been taken. They typically do not reserve campsites ahead of time because there can be unanticipated schedule changes due to weather, equipment malfunction, and injuries. When campgrounds are full, MSP staff work to find a spot for bicyclists to camp, but would like to have set-aside campsites specifically designed for these unique visitors.

A recent study by the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research at the University of Montana indicates Montana has the potential to become a bicycle touring destination, positively impacting tourism and the economy (Nickerson et. al. 2014). One of the major hurdles is the lack of “bicycle camps” with amenities such as bicycle racks, covered group shelters, electrical outlets, and bear-proof storage.

Whitefish Lake, Flathead Lake - Wayfarers, Placid Lake, and Salmon Lake State Parks in northwestern Montana are located near existing popular bicycle touring routes. Adventure Cycling, a Montana based company that develops bicycle touring maps, has identified

suitable touring routes that pass near several Montana state parks (Map 1). These parks are experiencing increasing demand for bicycle amenities and could support local and statewide tourism efforts focused on bicycle touring.



Map 1

This draft Environmental Assessment (EA) addresses four state parks because the proposed actions, reasonable alternatives, and potential impacts will generally be the same at each location. Following are descriptions of the existing conditions at each park:

Whitefish Lake State Park: Located on the western shore of Whitefish Lake near the City of Whitefish, Whitefish Lake State Park is a well-established park with many amenities. This smaller park is 10 acres in size and mostly wooded. Popular activities include boating, swimming, and water-skiing. There are 25 campsites with tent and RV campsites, as well as an existing shared group bicycle campsite. There are public restrooms, showers, a large day-use parking area, picnic shelters, a boat ramp, bear resistant storage lockers, and a pay telephone. There are three nationally recognized bicycle touring routes that pass near this site.

Flathead Lake - Wayfarers State Park: At 67 acres, this is a larger park located just south of the Town of Bigfork on Flathead Lake. The park has 40 campsites, hiking trails, a boat ramp, a pay telephone, public restrooms, showers, a large day-use parking area, and bear resistant storage lockers. Wayfarers State Park has one existing shared group bicycle campsite that is becoming increasingly popular. Wayfarers is a popular stop for cyclists touring through the Mission and Seeley-Swan Valleys in route between Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks.

Placid Lake State Park: At 31 acres in size, Placid Lake State Park is located approximately 50 miles northeast of Missoula and 7 miles south of the unincorporated community of Seeley Lake. Placid Lake State Park provides visitors with a full range of facilities including a boat ramp and docks, three campground loops with a total of 40 campsites, restrooms, showers, picnic area and shelter, and a swimming area. The park does not currently have any shared group bicycle campsites. This park is located at the southern end of the Seeley-Swan Valley, which is a popular cycling route between Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks.

Salmon Lake State Park: Salmon Lake State Park is a 42-acre park along the beautiful Clearwater River chain-of-lakes about 8 miles southeast of Seeley Lake. The park includes a day-use area with a boat-launch, public restrooms, picnic areas, and parking area. Hiking trails connect the day-use area to a separate campground area with 20 camping sites, a campground host camp pad, shower and restroom facilities, and an amphitheater. Salmon Lake State Park has one existing makeshift shared group bicycle campsite. This park is located at the southern end of the Seeley-Swan Valley, which is a popular cycling route between Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks.

II. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

In order to address increasing demand to accommodate touring bicyclists and support tourism, MSP proposes to enhance existing shared group bicycle campsites at Whitefish Lake and Flathead Lake - Wayfarers State Parks, and construct new shared group bicycle campsites at Placid Lake and Salmon Lake State Parks. These bicycle campsites would be located in or adjacent to previously developed areas within each state park. Appendix A includes maps of the proposed shared group bicycle campsite locations for each park.

The proposed improvements to the state parks would be funded by \$200,000 from the Montana Department of Commerce. Because these would be shared group sites that do not require space for vehicle or camper parking, camping fees would be lower than standard campsite fees. Shared group bicycle campsites would be available on a first-come, first-

served basis. While these sites would be designed specifically for bicyclists, the sites may also appeal to other non-motorized users, such as hikers or campers arriving by human-powered watercraft, such as kayaks. These shared sites would not be reservable. This proposal would develop sites large enough to handle a reasonable number of bicycle tourists each evening. Additionally, MSP would designate overflow camping locations should demand exceed capacity on any given night.

The existing shared group bicycle campsite at Whitefish Lake State Park would be enhanced by a bicycle rack, additional bear resistant food lockers, a potable water hydrant, and a 12-foot by 16-foot covered shelter. The shelter would be large enough to accommodate two picnic tables, a bicycle maintenance stand, and two electrical outlets (Figure 1).

Flathead Lake - Wayfarers, Placid Lake, and Salmon Lake State Parks have enough space for a shared group bicycle campsite with an area of 2,500 to 5,000 square feet per park. This would accommodate up to 10 tent spaces, a bicycle rack, fire ring, shelter (as previously described and shown in Figure 1), water hydrant, and bear resistant food locker (Figure 2). Electricity would be provided for a variety of purposes, such as charging devices or security lighting. Water hydrants would be included in parks where the water supply is located reasonably close to the proposed shared group bicycle campsites and substantial construction, such as pavement removal, would not be required. Trails may be improved or constructed to connect the shared group bicycle campsites to existing facilities at each park.

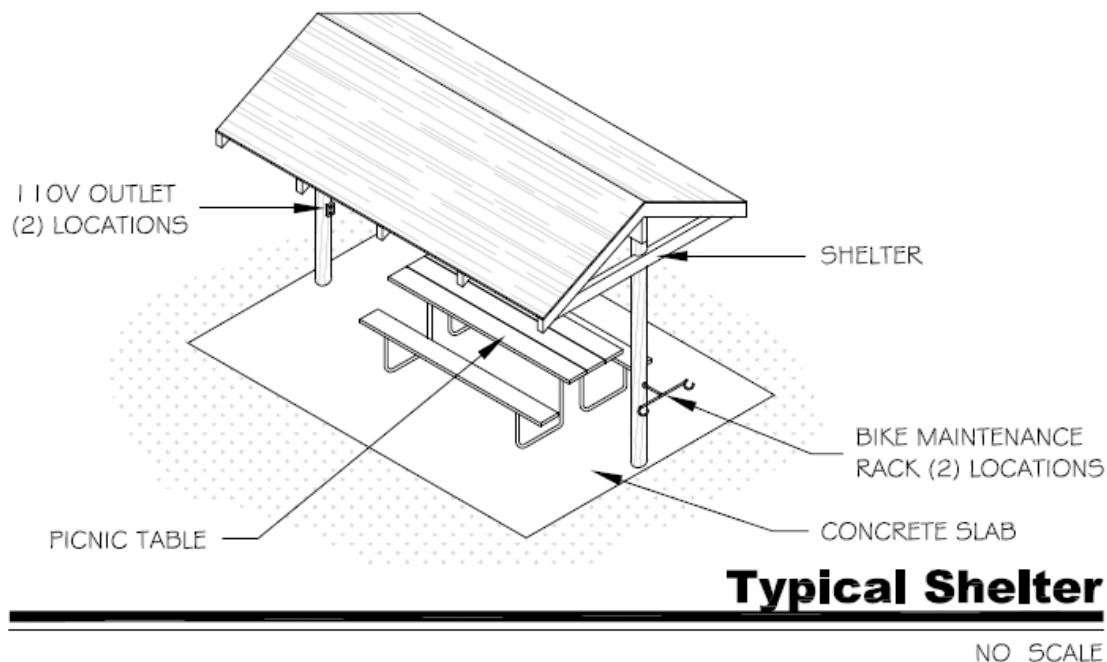


Figure 1: Typical Shelter

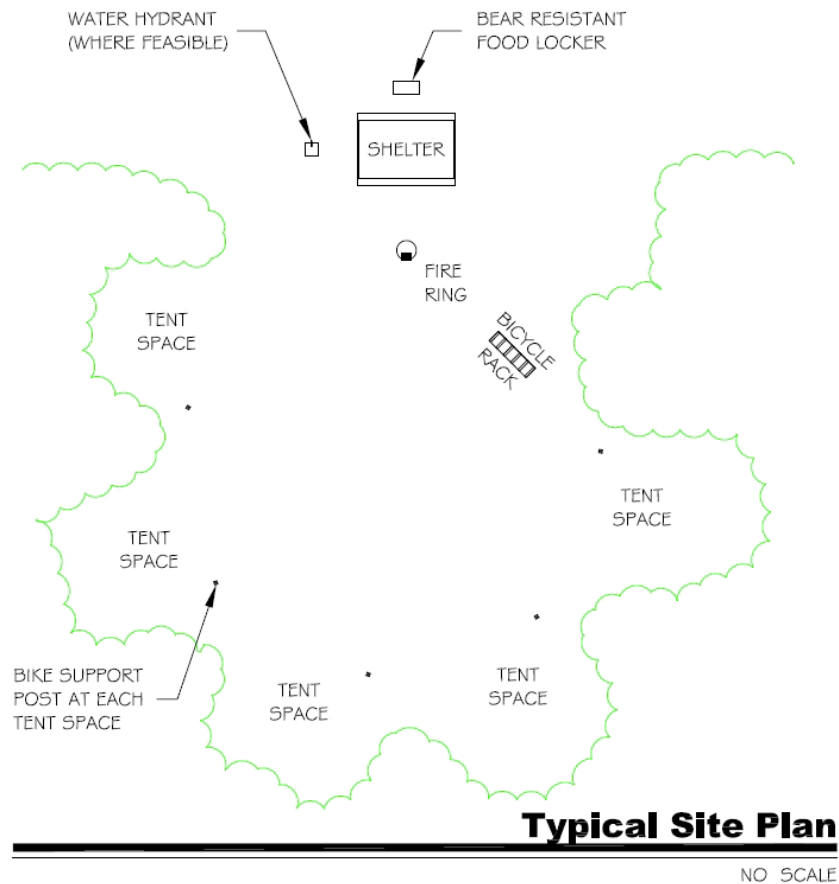


Figure 2: Typical Site Plan

III. DESCRIPTION OF REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION

No Action Alternative

The alternative to the proposed action is a no action alternative. If MSP does enhance or construct the shared group bicycle campsites at Whitefish Lake, Flathead Lake - Wayfarers, Placid Lake, and Salmon Lake State Parks, there would continue to be an unmet demand for campsites that are specifically designed to accommodate bicyclists. Touring bicyclists would continue to compete with other users for the tent and RV campsites. The bicyclists are at a disadvantage because they are often riding during the day and arrive late at the campground when most, if not all, sites have been taken. It is difficult for touring bicyclists to reserve campsites ahead of time because weather, bicycle malfunctions, and injuries can cause unanticipated schedule changes. Bicyclists would continue to pay higher campsite fees for amenities they may not need, such as a campsite large enough for a vehicle and RV hook-ups. This can be a challenge for bicyclists on a long-distance cycle tour that are seeking affordable camping.

IV. AUTHORITY AND DIRECTION

MSP has the authority to develop outdoor recreational resources in the state per Section 23-2-101, Montana Code Annotated (MCA). The public involvement for this EA follows Section 23-1-110 MCA and Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) 12.2.433.

V. EVALUATION OF IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The proposed actions at Flathead Lake - Wayfarers, Placid Lake, and Salmon Lake State Parks would result in a similar footprint of disturbance or affected area of approximately 2,500 to 5,000 square feet at each state park (Appendix A). There could be additional areas disturbed from connecting water and electricity lines, and improving or constructing trails. The proposed improvements would occur within state parks where previous construction activities associated with established campgrounds and day-use areas have already created a footprint of disturbance. The affected area at Whitefish Lake State Park would be much smaller because the proposal is to upgrade the existing shared group bicycle campsite.

1. Land Resources

Impacts of the Proposed Action: The proposed project would involve grading for tent spaces and concrete slab for the shelter; trenching for electrical lines to the outlets in the shelter; and trenching to connect water lines to water hydrants, where feasible. These activities would cause minimal disturbance to soils. Replacing soil and planting native vegetation in disturbed areas after construction would stabilize the soil and mitigate these minimal, adverse impacts.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative: There would be no changes to the existing soil conditions or geology.

2. Air

Impacts of the Proposed Action: Air quality would be minimally impacted temporarily during construction of the proposed improvements and would return to normal levels after construction.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative: There would be no changes to existing air quality.

3. Water

Impacts of the Proposed Action: The locations of the proposed shared group bicycle campsites are not near any streams or rivers. All 4 state parks are located along lakes. The bicycle campsites would be located adjacent to existing campsites far enough away from the shoreline to avoid any negative impacts. The additional bicyclists camping at each state park would require potable water, but this would not be substantial enough to affect groundwater supplies.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative: There would be no changes to the existing water quality or supply.

4. Vegetation

Impacts of the Proposed Action: The proposed project would require clearing some vegetation. The area of disturbance would be minor and located near previously disturbed areas. No wetlands or riparian vegetation would be disturbed. To mitigate these minimal, adverse impacts, MSP would plant native vegetation in disturbed areas and continue to manage the park for reduction of noxious weeds.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative: There would be no changes to the existing vegetation.

5. Fish/Wildlife

Impacts of the Proposed Action: The proposed action would not impact fish because the improvements would not be located in close proximity to habitat. These state parks are used seasonally by small populations of wildlife. Wildlife in the area is tolerant to some level of human presence within these well-established parks.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative: There would be no changes to existing fish and wildlife.

VI. EVALUATION OF IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

1. Noise/Electrical Effects

Impacts of the Proposed Action: There would be temporary noise related to construction of the shared group bicycle campsite infrastructure. To mitigate these minimal, adverse impacts, construction would occur during the off-season when the park is not experiencing high volumes of visitors.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative: There would be no changes to existing noise or electrical effects.

2. Land Use

Impacts of the Proposed Action: The proposed action would not impact land use. The state parks would remain open and available for recreation.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative: There would be no changes to the existing land use.

3. Risk/Health Hazards

Impacts of the Proposed Action: The proposed shared group bicycle campsites would provide touring bicyclists a safe place to camp. Even if the shared group bicycle campsites were already taken, MSP is proposing a “no turn away” policy to ensure touring bicyclists can get off the highway and find a safe place to camp before dark. This project would positively impact and improve safety.

The state parks are located where there can be human/bear conflicts. To mitigate potentially adverse impacts and threats to human safety, bear resistant food lockers would be located in each shared group bicycle campsite and campers would be required to follow the existing food storage rules that apply to all users.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative: There would be no changes to risk or health hazards.

4. Community Impact

Impacts of the Proposed Action: The proposed action is minor in scope and would not impact the community.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative: There would be no changes to the community.

5. Public Services/Taxes/Utilities

Impacts of the Proposed Action: There would be no substantial alteration in the need for public services or utilities as a result of the proposed action. There would be no change in taxes. No additional maintenance costs are associated with the proposed action as the affected areas would be small in size and require minimal maintenance.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative: There would be no changes to existing public services, taxes, or utilities.

6. Aesthetics/Recreation

Impacts of the Proposed Action: Since the affected areas are small in size, there would be no changes to aesthetics. The shared group bicycle campsites would improve recreation by providing touring bicyclists with safe, affordable campsites. This project could enhance local and statewide tourism efforts to make Montana a destination for bicycle touring. There would be positive impacts on recreation resulting from this project. Existing recreational use at the proposed state parks would be unaffected by the addition of the shared group bicycle campsites.

The fee for using a bicycle campsite is currently \$10 for Montana residents, \$18 for non-residents (\$10 with an annual pass), and \$5 for residents that are seniors or disabled. Revenue generated from the bicycle campsites would be used to support ongoing operations and maintenance of the state parks.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative: There would be no changes to aesthetics or recreation at the designated state parks. There would be a missed opportunity to enhance local and statewide efforts to make Montana a destination for bicycle touring.

7. Cultural/Historical Resources

Impacts of the Proposed Action: The proposed action is not expected to affect cultural or historic resources because the projects are small in scope, require minimal groundbreaking activities, and are located in already developed state parks. The Montana State Parks' Heritage Resource Program Manager would provide oversight of the improvements to ensure that the bicycle campsites do not affect any cultural or historical resources.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative: There would be no changes to cultural or historical resources.

VII. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE AND NEED FOR EIS

As a result of the proposed project being small in size and located in previously disturbed areas within state parks, the impacts to the physical and human environments would be minimal. MSP would mitigate these minimal, adverse impacts by replacing soil and planting native vegetation on any disturbed areas. Construction would take place during the off-season to avoid negative impacts to park visitors. Bear resistant food lockers and the established food storage rules would ensure the safety of bicycle campers. This project would positively impact local and statewide recreation and tourism related to bicycle touring. Based on this analysis, an Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis and an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

VIII. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The public notice and participation outlined below is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts, which can be mitigated. The public will be notified about this EA and the opportunity to comment through the following actions:

- Two public notices will be published in the *Daily Inter Lake, Missoulian*, and *Independent Record*
- One statewide press release
- Public notice on the Montana State Parks web page: <http://stateparks.mt.gov/>

The public comment period will extend for (30) thirty days and written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., February 5, 2016. The public can submit written comments to Bicycle Campsites EA, Montana State Parks, PO Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701. Or comments can be emailed to treilly@mt.gov.

IX. PERSONS RESPONSIBLE FOR PREPARING THIS EA

Tom Reilly, Assistant Administrator
Montana State Parks
PO Box 200701, Helena, MT, 59620
treilly@mt.gov

Renee Lemon, Land Use Planner
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
PO Box 200701, Helena, MT, 59620
rlemon@mt.gov

X. DOCUMENTS REFERENCED

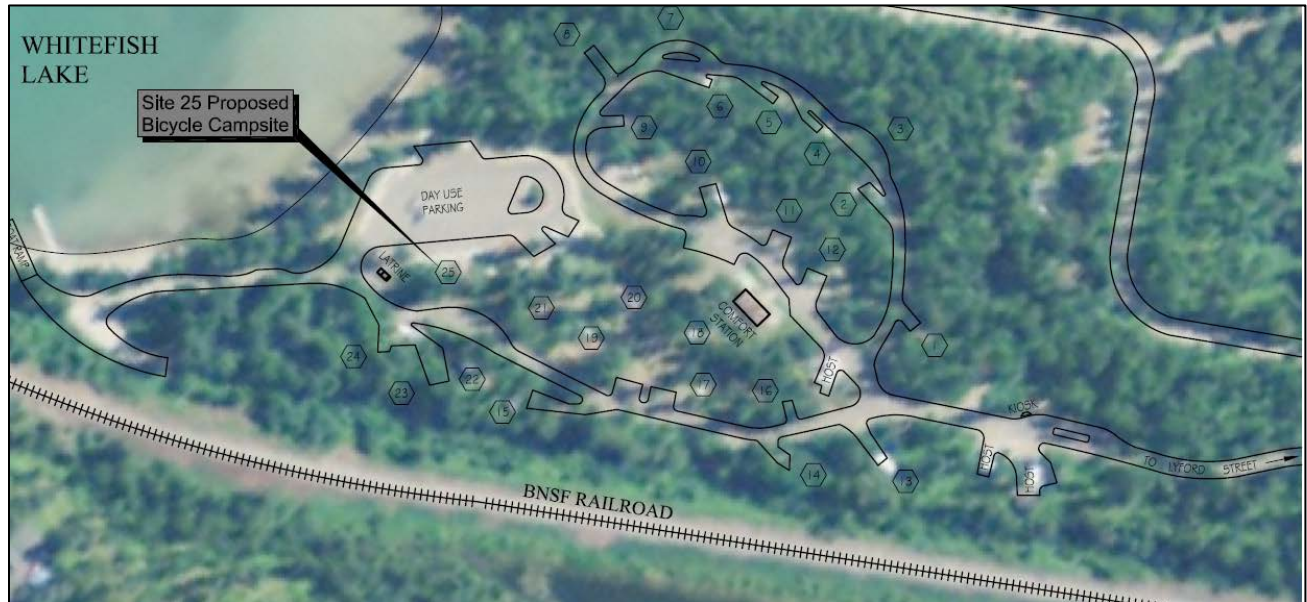
Montana State Parks. 2014. Charting a New Tomorrow: Montana State Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan, 2015-2020. Montana State Parks, Helena, Montana.

Nickerson, N. P., J. Jorgenson, M. Berry, and J. Kwenye. 2014. Analysis of Touring Cyclists: Impacts, Needs and Opportunities for Montana. Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research Publications, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.

XI. APPENDICES

- A. Maps showing locations of proposed bicycle campsites
- B. MCA 23-1-110 Qualification Checklist
- C. Tourism Report – Montana Department of Commerce

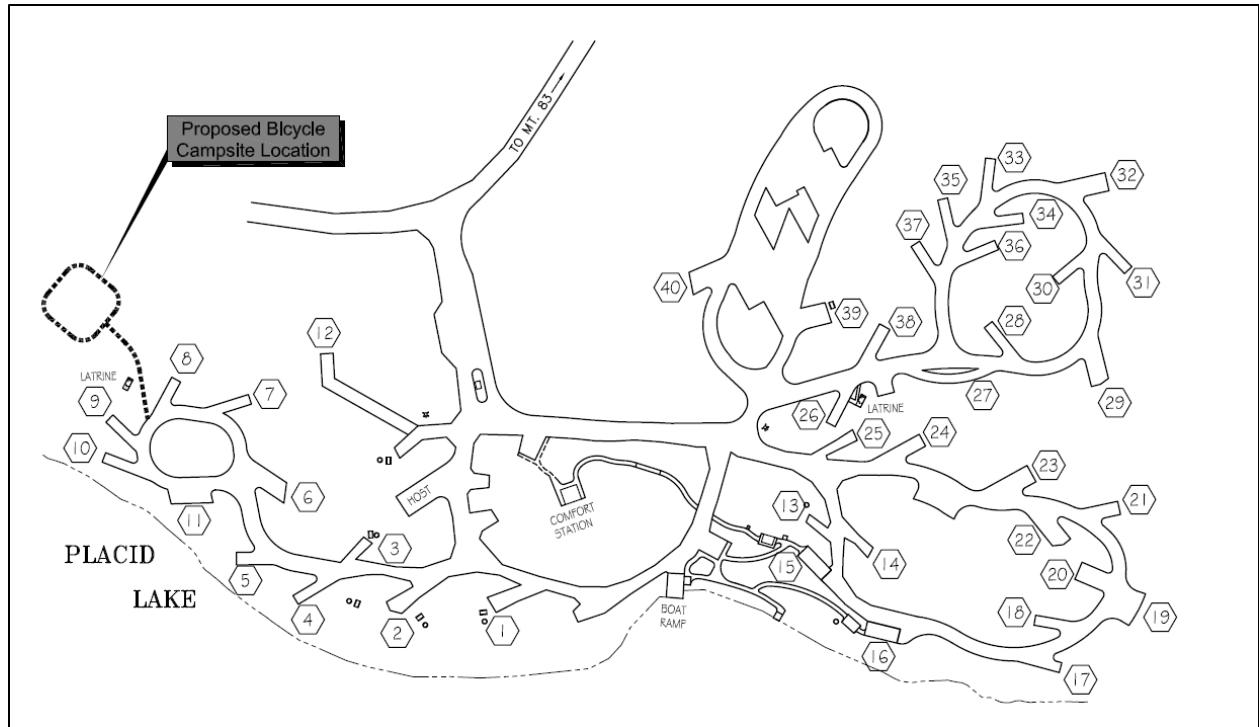
Appendix A



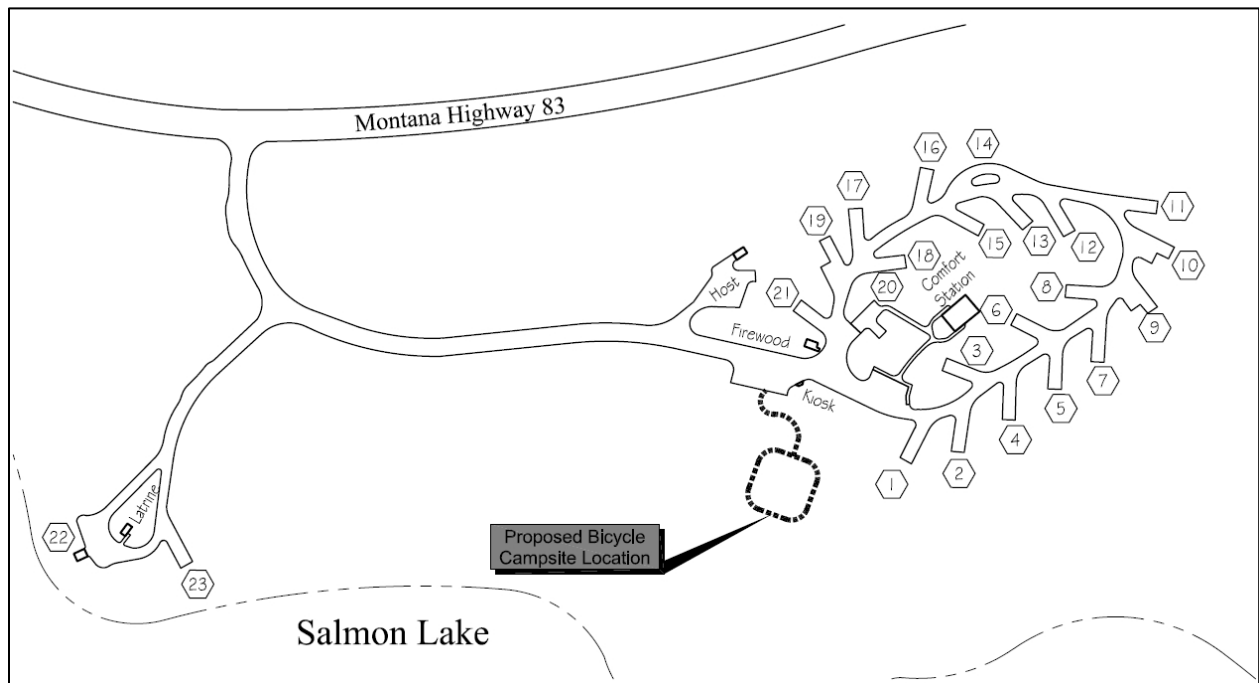
Whitefish Lake State Park Site Plan



Flathead Lake - Wayfarers State Park Site Plan



Placid Lake State Park Site Plan



Salmon Lake State Park Site Plan

Appendix B

23-1-110 MCA PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

Date: December 29, 2015

Person Reviewing: Renee Lemon

Project Location: Whitefish Lake, Wayfarers, Placid Lake, and Salmon Lake State Parks

Description of Proposed Work: Montana State Parks proposes to add bicycle campsites to Whitefish Lake, Wayfarers, Placid Lake, and Salmon Lake State Parks. This project would address an increasing demand to provide amenities for touring bicyclists. An existing campsite at Whitefish Lake would be converted to 2 to 3 tent spaces with a bicycle rack, bear resistant food locker, and shelter. The shelter would comprise of a picnic table, 2 bicycle maintenance racks, and 2 electrical outlets on a concrete slab. Wayfarers, Placid Lake, and Salmon Lake State Parks have enough acreage for a larger bicycle camp that would have 5 tent spaces, a bicycle rack, fire ring, shelter (as previously described), water hydrant (where feasible), and bear resistant food locker.

The following checklist is intended to be a guide for determining whether a proposed development or improvement is of enough significance to fall under 23-1-110 rules. (Please check ☐ all that apply and comment as necessary.)

- [X] A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?
Comments: There may be trail improvements or additions to connect the shared group bicycle campsites to existing facilities at each state park.
- [] B. New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?
Comments: No buildings would be constructed.
- [] C. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?
Comments: Minimal excavations may be required to install hydrants and electrical outlets, but would not exceed 20 c.y.
- [] D. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?
Comments: This proposal would not involve parking lots.
- [] E. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a double wide boat ramp or handicapped fishing station?
Comments: This proposal would not affect the shoreline.
- [] F. Any new construction into lakes, reservoirs, or streams?
Comments: Proposed improvement would not be located near lakes, reservoirs, or streams.
- [] G. Any new construction in an area with National Registry quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?
Comments: The proposed action is minor in scope and located in already developed state parks. The Montana State Parks' Heritage Resource Program Lead would ensure that the bicycle campsites do not affect any cultural or historical resources.

☐ H. Any new above ground utility lines?
Comments: No

☒ I. Any increase or decrease in campsites of 25% or more of an existing number of campsites?
Comments: Yes, Salmon Lake State Park currently has 20 campsites. The proposed addition of 5 bicycle campsites would increase the total number of campsites by 25%.

☐ J. Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern; including effects of a series of individual projects?
Comments: This proposal would not result in any significant changes to the state parks or use.

If any of the above are checked, 23-1-110 MCA rules apply to this proposed work and should be documented in the EA.

Appendix C

TOURISM REPORT

MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (MEPA) & MCA 23-1-110

Montana State Parks has initiated the review process as mandated by MCA 23-1-110 and the Montana Environmental Policy Act in its consideration of the project described below. As part of the review process, input and comments are being solicited. Please complete the project name and project description portions and submit this form to:

Jeri Duran, Director of Sales and Constituent Services
Montana Office of Tourism
301 S. Park Ave.
Helena, MT 59601

Project Name: Bicycle Campsites at Whitefish Lake, Wayfarers, Placid Lake, and Salmon Lake State Parks

Project Description: Montana State Parks proposes to add bicycle campsites to Whitefish Lake, Wayfarers, Placid Lake, and Salmon Lake State Parks. This project would address an increasing demand to provide amenities for touring bicyclists. An existing campsite at Whitefish Lake would be converted to 2 to 3 tent spaces with a bicycle rack, bear resistant food locker, and shelter. The shelter would comprise of a picnic table, 2 bicycle maintenance racks, and 2 electrical outlets on a concrete slab. Wayfarers, Placid Lake, and Salmon Lake State Parks have enough acreage for a larger bicycle camp that would have 5 tent spaces, a bicycle rack, fire ring, shelter (as previously described), water hydrant (where feasible), and bear resistant food locker.

1. Would this site development project have an impact on the tourism economy?
NO YES If YES, briefly describe:

Yes, as described, this project has the potential to positively impact the tourism and recreation industry economy if properly maintained. This project is in alignment with what the Office of Tourism is doing to increase bicycle tourism in Montana. We are assuming the agency has determined it has necessary funding for the on-going operations and maintenance once this project is complete.

2. Does this impending improvement alter the quality or quantity of recreation/tourism opportunities and settings?
NO YES If YES, briefly describe:

Yes, as described, the project has the potential to improve quality and quantity of tourism and recreational opportunities if properly maintained. We are assuming the agency has determined it has necessary funding for the on-going operations and maintenance once this project is complete.

Signature: Jeri Duran, Bureau Chief

Date: November 30, 2015